

Panel Examining Whether Gates Slanted

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In 1985, Robert M. Gates, then head of the CIA analysis directorate, presented policymakers with a study strongly suggesting Soviet involvement in the plot to kill the pope, without revealing he had told his analysts to ignore contrary evidence, according to allegations made to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The allegation is likely to come up Friday in a classified session where several CIA analysts are expected to argue that Gates was involved in "cooking the books" or politicizing intelligence to fit administration policy aims. The committee has been interviewing former

and present analysts on the "politicization" issue.

It will not be the first time the subject has arisen in the hearings. On Tuesday, for example, Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.) suggested that Gates had drawn selectively from intelligence data in preparing a 1986 speech building up the Soviet Union's capacity to have an SDI-type space-based defense program. Gates said he did not distort the data, but probably should not have been taking such public stands, particularly "where there is a risk of the speech being misinterpreted as advocacy of a policy."

The attempt on Pope John Paul II's life occurred in 1981, renewing debate about a Soviet role in international terrorism. In May 1985,

Gates asked for a review of the evidence of whether the Soviets might have been involved in a plot against the pope. According to the allegations presented to the committee, Gates asked that the study make the strongest case for a Soviet role, ignoring any evidence to the contrary.

After the assessment was complete, Gates allegedly removed from the study a prefatory remark that explained the one-sided approach to the subject. He allegedly added a cover sheet under his own name suggesting that it was a balanced consensus, one intelligence source said.

"The exercise as conceived may well have been legitimate," one source said. "The question is the objectivity of the presentation."

In two brief references to the

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dispute Tuesday, Gates referred only to a "review of all of the analysis that had been done on the attempted assassination of the pope that I directed."

He said there had been a "mind-set" at the agency that "accepted the idea that a lone gunman was responsible" and that the agency moved with "extreme caution in trying to deal with the problem."

At another point, he said he ordered another CIA officer to write "an attack" on the study he had commissioned, and then asked the CIA Product Evaluation staff "to go back and review the entire record of how we had done..."

"So, the way I would characterize myself is as a person who has strong views, but I am open to dif-

ferent interpretations. I also recognize and am willing to acknowledge when I've been wrong."

The debate over politicization is not new, and Gates has criticized the slanting of intelligence. In one article, he wrote that it would "transgress the single, deepest ethical and cultural principle of the CIA."

Senators supporting his nomination appear to be offering him an opportunity to defuse the issue. Responding to a question from Sen. John W. Warner (R-Va.), Gates said it is "something I have grappled with throughout my career. When I was a young analyst I was absolutely convinced that the refusal to accept my analysis was politically motivated by the people on the seventh floor of the agency."